

THE VALLEY OF LILIES

of Jesus Christ, I pray you deign to do.' When, therefore, the time had passed in such conversation and night was at hand, he (not, indeed, mocking her, as he had thought to do, but nevertheless, in his heart, making little account of her) said : * I see the hour is kte, and therefore deem I had better go ; I will return on another occasion at a more suitable hour.' And so he rose up to go. But, as he went away, the holy virgin followed him, and, kneeling with crossed arms, besought him to bless her ; which he did. And, when she had his blessing, she besought him to remember her in his prayers. Then he, moved rather by shame-facedness than by devotion, asked her to pray for him, which she gladly promised she would do. He, therefore, went away, as I said, making small account of her, deeming her to be a good woman, but not worthy of her great reputation."

During the following night, Lazzarino rose to meditate upon the lecture which he was to deliver the next morning, and found himself overwhelmed by a flood of tears, which he was unable to check. In the morning, he forced himself to go to the schools and read his lecture perfunctorily, at once leaving the room when he had finished, because he could not contain his tears. So passed the day, until, in the night, he began to think that he had unwittingly offended God. Then a voice spoke in his heart: " Hast thou so soon forgotten that, the day before, thou didst scorn My faithful handmaid Catherine with so orgulous a mind, and that, albeit feignedly, thou didst nevertheless commend thyself to her prayers ?" Before sunrise, he left San Francesco and hastened to Catherine's house. Catherine herself, "not ignorant of the things that were being worked in this man by her Spouse," opened the door. He fell at her feet; she knelt and implored him to rise. Entering the cell, he humbly sat down like her on the floor, and, after ° a long and holy colloquy," besought her to adopt him as a son, and to direct him in the way of God. " But when she said that he knew the way of God better, by means of the holy Scriptures, he answered that he knew the rind, but she tasted the very pith* At length, constrained by his earnest prayers, she answered : ° The way of salvation for your soul is